

Date: June 29, 2015  
To: Friends of Democracy Corps and WVVAF  
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## **A Powerful Agenda for 2016**

### *Democrats Need to Give Voters a Reason to Participate*

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Democrats are well positioned leading into next year's elections if they give their base, particularly unmarried women, a reason to turn out and vote. As this research demonstrates, the promise of an agenda that addresses the real economy of everyday Americans and—this is an equally important piece—also provides them with a more responsive and equitable government gives key blocks in the Democratic coalition a greater stake in this election.

A new survey of 950 likely 2016 voters sponsored by *Democracy Corps* and *Women's Voices, Woman Vote Action Fund* shows Hillary Clinton with a stable and impressive lead over prominent Republican contenders (Marco Rubio and Scott Walker). The Democratic margin in a named congressional vote, up significantly from the 2014 election, inches up higher, and has moved 11 points in the Democratic direction since last November.<sup>1</sup> This Democratic strength reflects the changing demographic reality of the new American electorate. Unmarried women, people of color, millennials—voters of the Rising American Electorate (RAE)—will make up a majority of voters for the first time in 2016. This new American majority carries with them a new American agenda.

The dominant reason for Democratic vigor in this survey is the deep backing that Clinton and the Democrats enjoy among voters in the Rising American Electorate, where Clinton matches Obama's 2012 vote and exceeds his showing among white unmarried women. These voters sustain Democratic margins.

The Republicans also face a severe brand problem. They are defined, at least for now, by an increasingly unpopular Republican Congress and a Republican congressional leadership that has become a pariah among voters. Both Boehner and McConnell draw record unfavorable numbers in this survey, and the Speaker draws majority negative reviews. In addition, the Republicans have failed to adapt to the collapse in conservative culture. As others have highlighted, and as this survey reinforces, the number of voters who describe themselves as conservative has dropped sharply; voters' reactions to pro-life groups, marriage equality and, to a lesser degree, the NRA, further reveals this ideological shift. The Republicans grow increasingly out of touch culturally with the country, a process likely accelerated by their nomination process.

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<sup>1</sup> National survey of 950 likely 2016 voters, 60 percent cell, June 13-17, 2015. This research was a joint project of Democracy Corps, Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund, and the Voter Participation Center. This research is informed by two sets of focus groups conducted in Jacksonville and Orlando Florida on May 19 and June 4, 2015. The Voter Participation research related to nonpartisan questions regarding policy topics.



Democrats also face their own challenges. Their base, specifically RAE voters and unmarried women, betray a huge disparity in interest and enthusiasm for participating in the 2016 elections compared to their more conservative counterparts. A 67 percent majority of non-RAE voters describe their level of interest in the highest terms (a “ten” on a ten-point scale). Among RAE voters, this number drops to 48 percent. These voters demonstrate real doubts about the ability of the government to deliver on the change they need. The disparity in interest among Democratic base groups is a direct threat to their strategy, regardless of the outcome in 2016.

Nonetheless, this survey produces a big jump in Democratic enthusiasm after voters hear an agenda that speaks to their lives and promises a government that serves their interests, particularly among Democratic base groups such as unmarried women and drop-off voters.

This agenda is big and progressive. It addresses an economy that still does not work for them and does not produce jobs that pay enough to sustain a family. Changes like equal pay for women, a solution to the problems within Medicare and Social Security, and a serious and bold investment in our infrastructure find traction not just among base groups, but among blue collar voters as well. But this agenda also confronts government that too often seems indifferent or even hostile to their interests.

In the focus groups preceding this survey, participants described themselves as entirely disconnected from their leaders, and described a leadership class more focused on lining their pockets than helping people like them. Progressive government reform that promises to rid the system of waste and duplication, simplify the tax code, make government more “user-friendly,” and eliminate subsidies for rich corporate interests, together with serious economic changes, energizes key base groups.

**Important methodology note:** In order to account for ever-changing demographics and accurately sample the full American electorate, for the first time, 60 percent of respondents in this survey were reached by cell phone.

## Some Key Findings

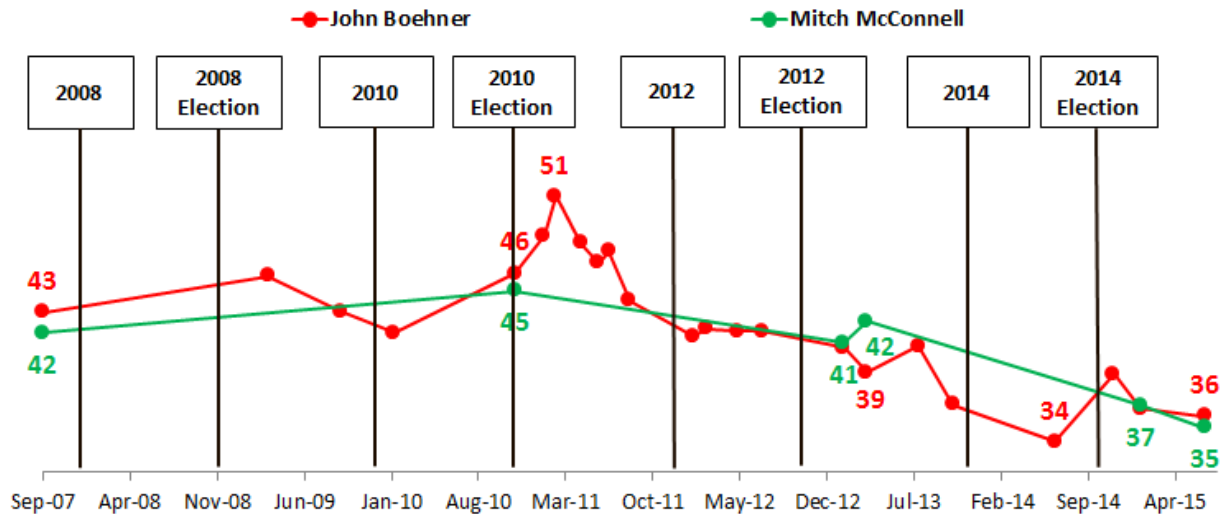
### The Republican Congress and leadership poison the Republican brand.

- A 52 percent majority indicates an unfavorable reaction to the Republican Congress, up from 45 percent in November, 2014. Among the Independent and white working class voters, who largely delivered the Republican Congress in 2010 and 2014, negative ratings reach 54 percent and 42 percent, respectively.
- Even more dramatic is the toxic reaction to the Republican leadership. Speaker Boehner draws a 54 percent negative rating, his second worst score in this data set and up six points from January. New Majority Leader Mitch McConnell draws an 18 percent warm, 48 percent cool rating, also setting a record.



## Boehner and McConnell ratings at historic lows

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that person or organization. If you have no opinion or never heard of that person or organization, please say so.



From Democracy Corps surveys conducted 7 years. Data represents MEAN ratings.

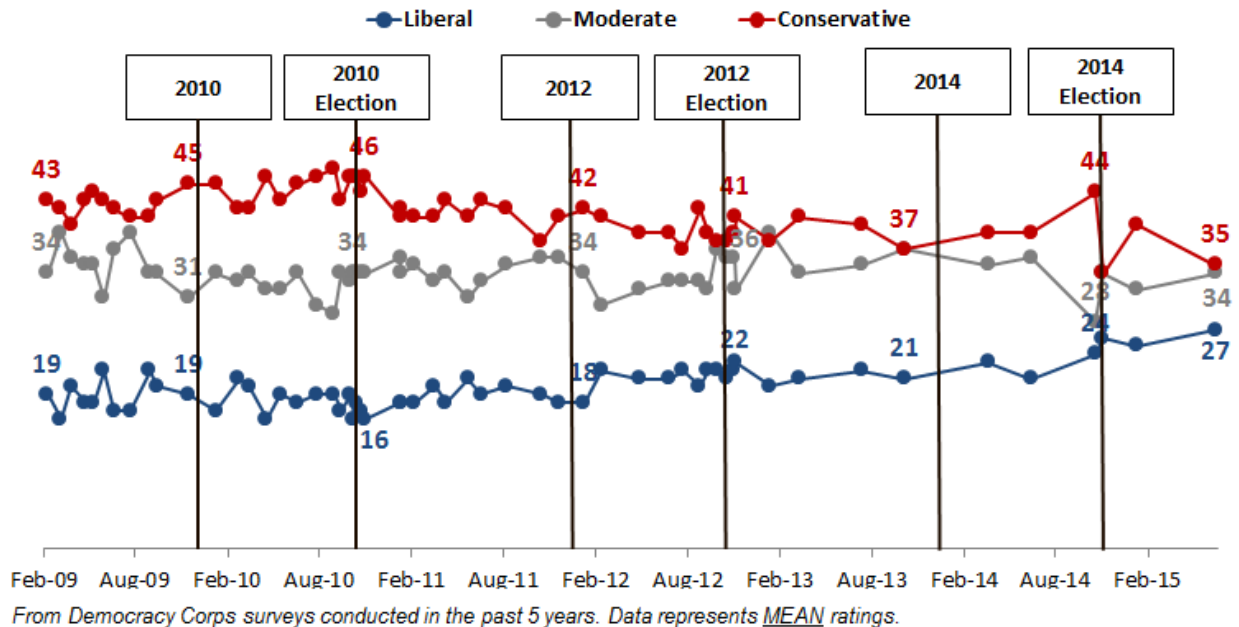
### Conservatives grow out of touch with the country culturally.

- This country's leftward shift on cultural issues also undermines the political appeal of the Grand Old Party. When Democracy Corps started tracking sentiment toward marriage equality in 2001, it revealed a 56 percent unfavorable rating, just 22 percent favorable. It now stands at 46 percent favorable, 34 percent unfavorable, and enjoys 60 percent support in other national surveys. A 45 percent plurality respond negatively to "pro-life, anti-abortion" groups, up 5 points from 2014 and the highest negative recorded. Although the NRA remains fairly popular overall, even they slip some in this survey, while hostility toward undocumented immigrants declines.
- Since the Reagan revolution, voters have typically been twice as likely to describe themselves as conservative than as liberal. In the 2008 electorate that voted for Barack Obama, conservatives enjoyed a 19-point edge in self-identification. Now, that margin stands at just 8 points. Conservative identification drops to 31 percent among Independent voters. Women now divide evenly (31 percent liberal, 31 percent conservative). White millennials, who voted Republican in 2010, 2012 and 2014, divide 38 percent liberal, 25 percent conservative.



## Clear evidence of cultural shift – conservative identity drops, liberal identity rises

*Thinking in political terms, would you say that you are Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal?*



### President Obama and the Affordable Care Act improve

- The country remains in a sour mood (61 percent wrong track, unchanged from our January survey), but the President is back above water in his job performance ratings (50 percent approve, 46 percent disapprove) and reaches 52 percent favorable in personal appeal.
- The Affordable Care Act has also improved, reaching 44 percent favorable, 44 percent unfavorable. This represents the strongest numbers recorded for this legislation in this data set. Criticism among Independents drops from 55 percent last November to 48 percent currently. Among unmarried women, support grows to 50 percent favorable, 34 percent unfavorable, the best showing in this group in three years, and it reaches 52 percent favorable among millennial voters. Given the Supreme Court decision this morning, the improvement in support for the Affordable Care Act may be one of the more important findings in this survey.

### Democratic margins stable or growing due to support among RAE and unmarried women

- A toxic leadership and long-term ideological drift play a role in the inability of the Republicans to exploit the accusations hurled at the presumptive Democratic nominee, but the proximate cause is the rock-solid support the Democrats enjoy among voters in the

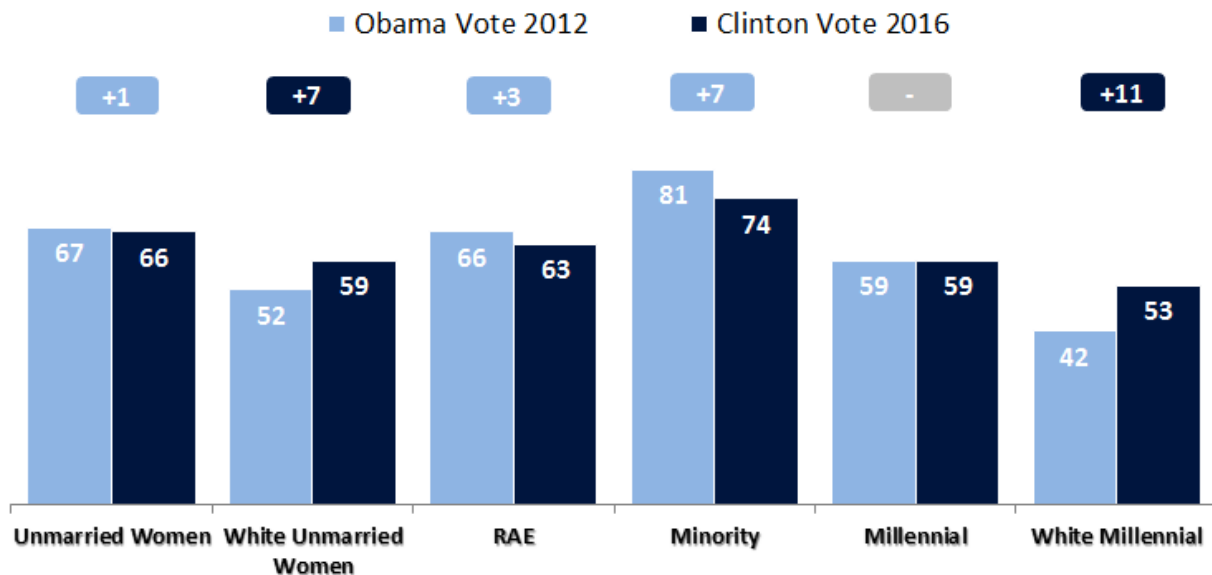


Rising American Electorate and, more specifically, unmarried women. Hillary Clinton’s current standing reflects some of the recent controversy (44 percent favorable, 48 percent unfavorable, down from 45 percent – 43 percent in January). Nonetheless, she holds a consistent margin among top-tier Republican candidates (50 percent Clinton, 43 percent Walker; 50 percent Clinton, 41 percent Rubio).

This margin reflects her support among voters in the RAE, which is comparable to Obama’s showing in 2012. Among white unmarried women, Clinton performs well above Obama, and unmarried women are one of the few groups where Clinton has improved her personal appeal (now 61 percent favorable, 31 percent unfavorable) over the last six months.

### Clinton near or exceeding Obama’s 2012 performance among base groups

*Thinking about the election for Congress in 2016, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for [NAMED] the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate?*



Democracy Corps national post-election survey from 2012.

Clinton does not overcome recent Democratic losses among Independent voters (44 percent Republican candidate on the combined measure, 41 percent Clinton), nor is she competitive among white non-college voters (57 – 35 percent), though she closes somewhat among non-college white women (53 – 41 percent).

- There is some evidence that the presidential race is having downballot impacts. The overall margin in the named congressional vote stands at five points (48 percent Democratic, 43 percent Republican).<sup>2</sup> However, Democrats have picked up more significant

<sup>2</sup> The names of incumbents were used in this trial heat. Challengers were described as Democratic or Republican candidates.



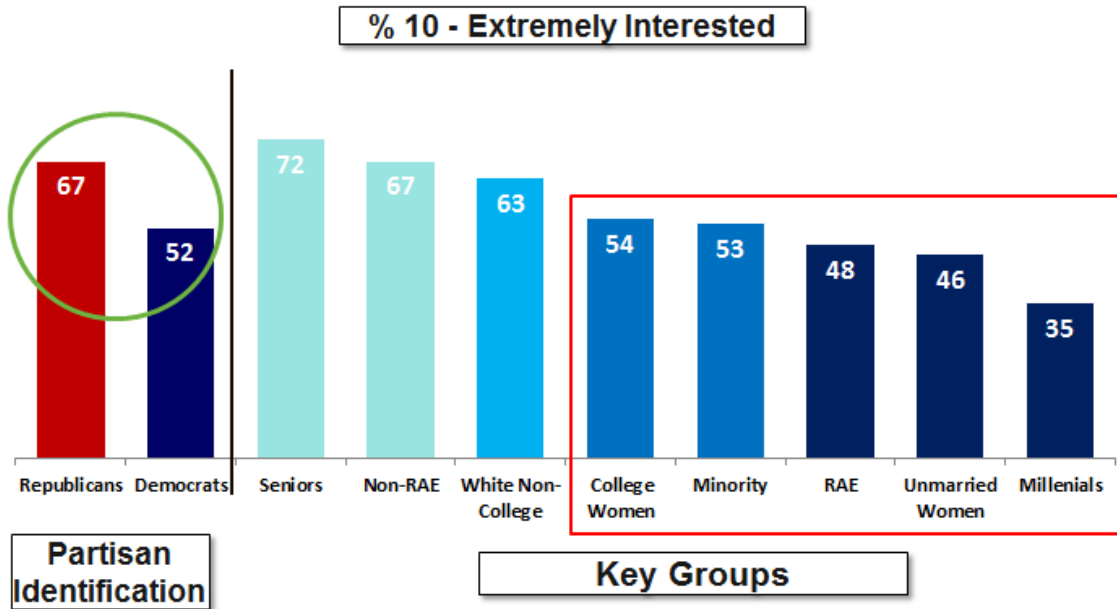
support among college educated women (now 55 to 35 percent Democratic) and lead 57 to 38 percent among white unmarried women. Democratic incumbents (58 percent) also seem far more secure in their seats in this change environment than Republican incumbents (52 percent).

Disparities in interest and enthusiasm threaten Democratic strategy.

- Currently, only 52 percent of Democrats rate their level of interest in the 2016 elections as a 10, compared to 67 percent of Republican voters.<sup>3</sup> Similar gaps emerge looking at RAE and non-RAE voters, younger and older voters, and married women and unmarried women. African American turnout exceeded white turnout in 2012. Currently, however, African American interest trails white interest by 5 points (53 percent ten and 58 percent ten, respectively).

### Low enthusiasm among key groups serious threat to Democrats

*And, how interested are you in the November elections for U.S. Congress and other state and local offices? Please rate your interest from one to ten, with one meaning that you have no interest in this election and ten meaning that you are extremely interested. Of course, you can choose any number between one and ten.*



Voters open to a bold, progressive economic agenda.

- Republicans still maintain a small (5 point) advantage over the Democrats on the economy. When it comes to policy choices, however, voters prefer a bold and progressive Democratic vision over a more-narrow, supply-side Republican vision. Indeed, the

<sup>3</sup> This measure has been validated using prior data and updated voter lists as being predictive of actual turnout.

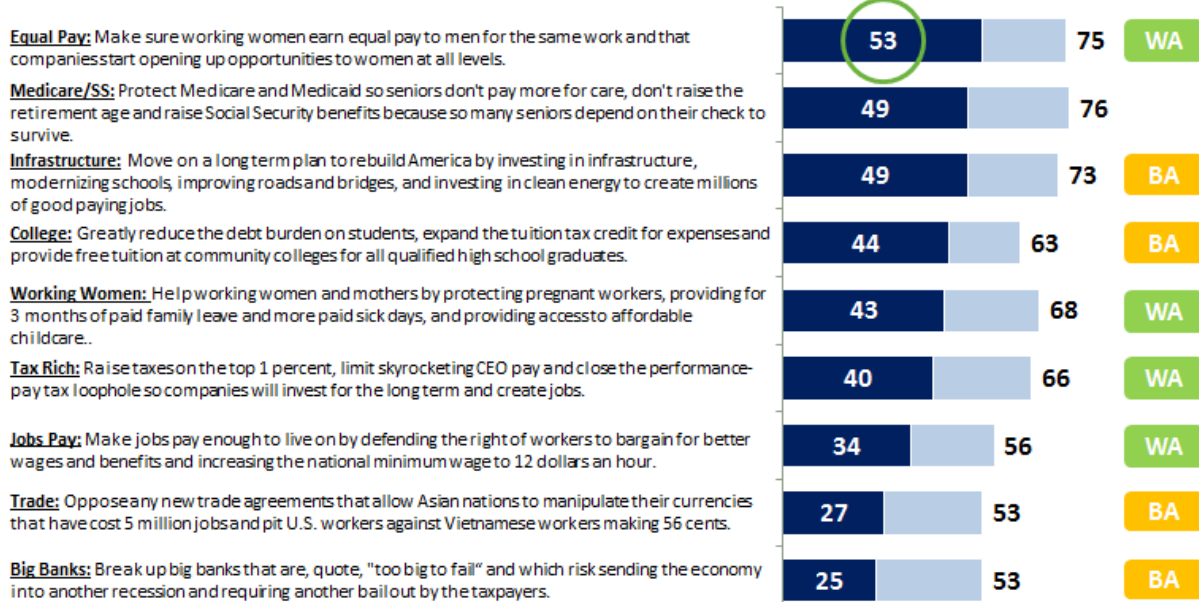




strongest Republican policy reaches 41 percent for the highest rating (“much more positive”). Five alternative Democratic policies meet or exceed this number.

### Strong support for Democratic economic policies

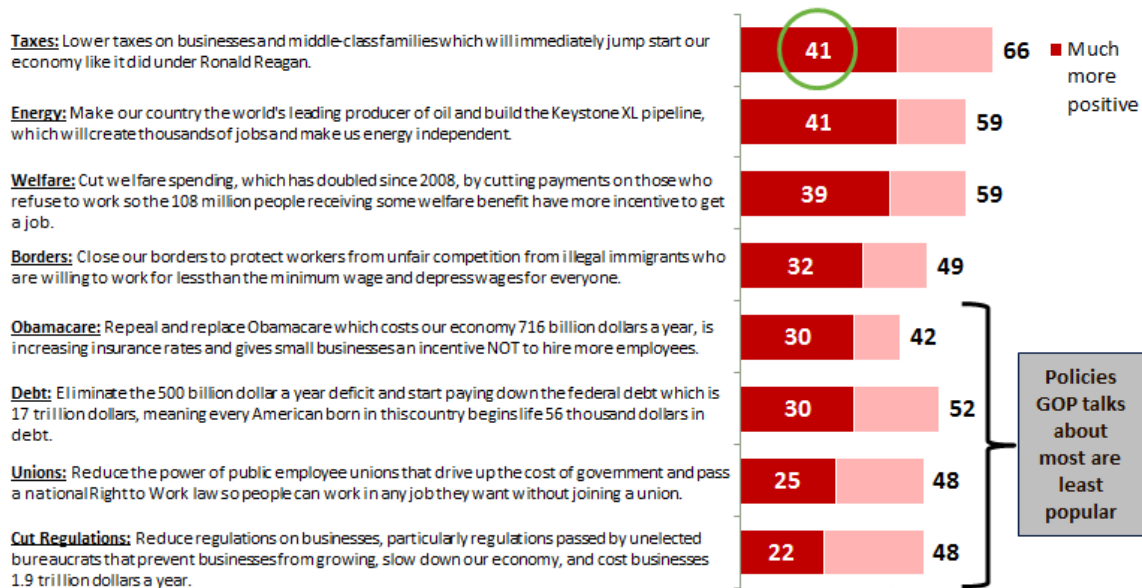
Now I am going to read you some things being proposed by DEMOCRATS as part of their plan to deal with the economy. After each item, please tell me whether that policy makes you feel much more positive about their plan, somewhat more positive, a little more positive, or not at all positive.



WA stands for half sample that heard a “women’s” economic agenda, BA for the half sample hearing the “broad” economic agenda

### Much less support for Republican policies

Now I am going to read you some things being proposed by REPUBLICANS as part of their plan to deal with the economy. After each item, please tell me whether that policy makes you feel much more positive about their plan, somewhat more positive, a little more positive, or not at all positive.





- Policies that energize Democratic base voters include equal pay (78 percent among unmarried women, 73 percent among millennial women), protecting Medicare (54 percent among RAE voters), a serious investment in infrastructure (60 percent among white millennials, the highest policy response in this group) and paid sick leave (64 percent among unmarried women).
- In regression analysis, more labor-driven policies—defending worker’s rights to bargain collectively and opposing unfair trade agreements—prove most predictive of supporting congressional Democratic candidates.
- This agenda helps improve Democratic competitiveness among white blue collar voters. These voters prefer the Republicans on the economy by more than 30 points. And yet, the top four Democratic policies prove just as powerful among these voters as the top four Republican policies.

Democratic reform efforts focus both on inequality and government service.

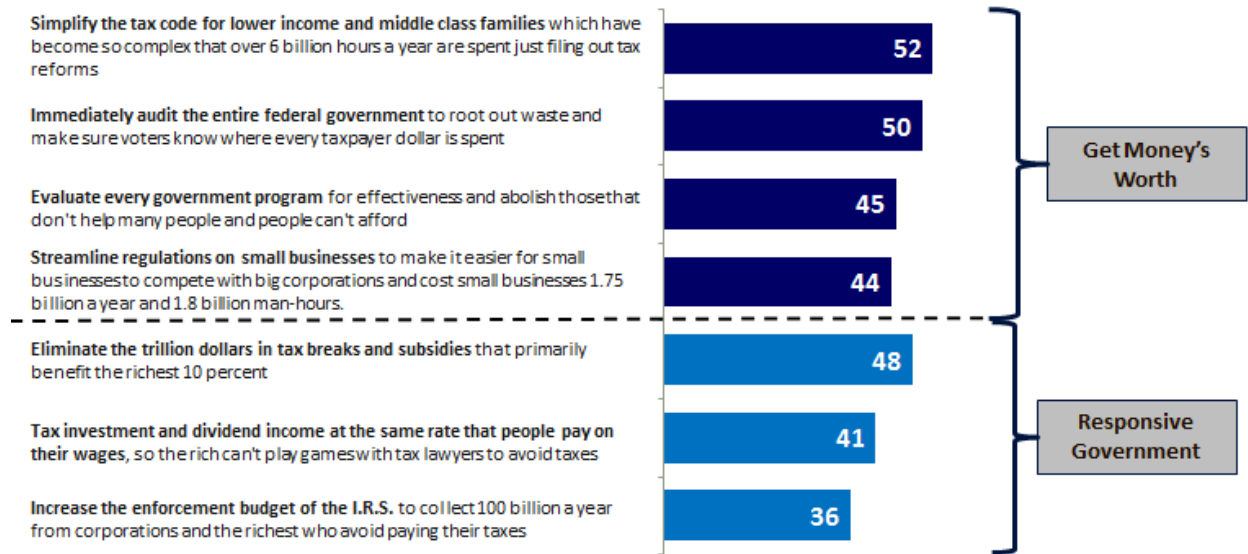
- Voters believe that government is for sale, that the wealthy and corporate interests make campaign contributions that confer economic advantages, often at the expense of working people. In focus groups, voters talked about corporations “sponsoring” their favorite politician. Voters are well aware—particularly in the battleground state of Florida where the groups took place—of the gathering storm of corporate campaign spending after the Citizens United decision. Democratic efforts to rein in campaign spending prove just as powerful as broad economic policies, particularly efforts to improve transparency in campaign giving (47 percent much more positive).
- But many voters also doubt the ability of government to deliver the changes they need. Democratic government reform aimed at improving government service and eliminating redundancy find just as much support as efforts to rid government of corporate subsidies. Indeed, the strongest reform among millennial voters is simplifying the tax code for middle income taxpayers. In regression analysis, evaluating government programs for effectiveness is nearly as predictive of support for Democratic candidates as is eliminating the one trillion dollars in tax breaks and subsidies for the richest 10 percent.





## Democratic government reforms that focus on getting taxpayers their money's worth have slight edge

*Now I am going to read you additional proposals from the Democrats to make sure taxpayers get their money's worth and make sure government works for them. Please pick the TWO you believe are the most important.*



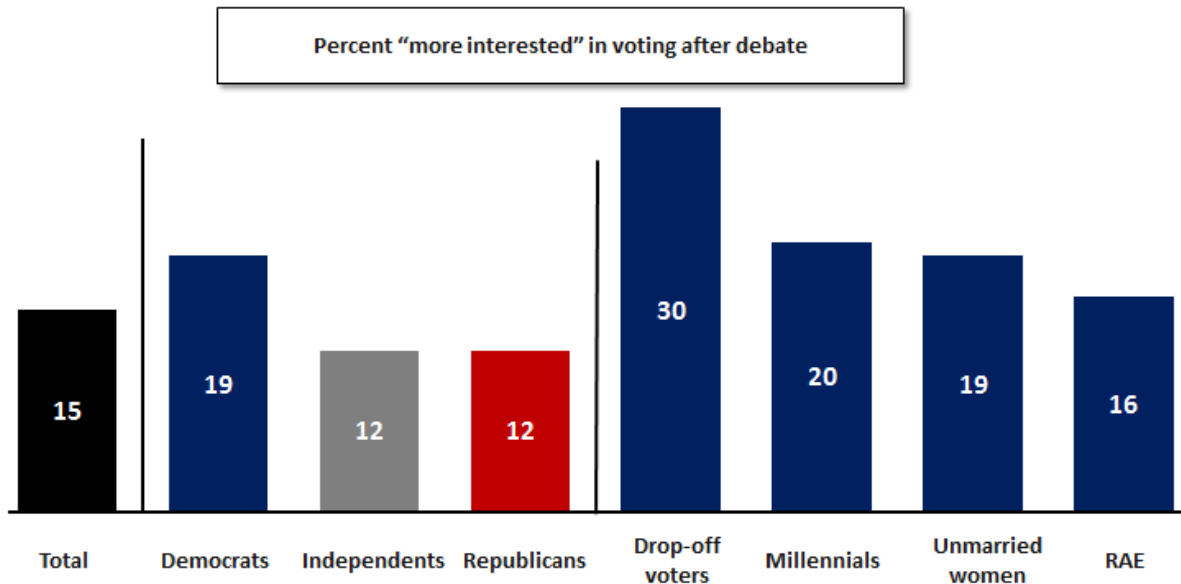
Together, the economic and reform agendas produce important movement in the electorate, even when competing against the Republican agendas.

- The Democrats' biggest problem right now is enthusiasm. But at the conclusion of the survey, 19 percent of Democrats shift toward being more interested, compared to just 12 percent among Republicans. We find other disproportionate jumps in enthusiasm among RAE voters, including unmarried women and minorities.



## Disproportionately motivates base Dem groups to vote

*How interested are you in the November, 2016 elections for President, U.S. Congress and other state and local offices? Please rate your interest from one to ten, with one meaning that you have no interest in this election and ten meaning that you are extremely interested. Of course, you can choose any number between one and ten.*



- Politics has grown so polarized, it is hard to produce big changes in voter choices. Nonetheless, voters who heard Democrats' broad economic agenda—less focused on women—paired with the government reform agenda shift toward the Democratic candidate at the conclusion of the survey, moving two points overall (to 50 percent Democratic, 41 percent Republican candidate), including a notable improvement among white working class voters (to 36 percent Democratic candidate). If Democrats approach 36 percent among these voters, Republicans face a huge math problem cobbling together a majority.

### Conclusion

Eighteen months out, both parties face significant challenges. It is possible that the Republican nominee will be able to mitigate their brand problem. It is also possible that any Republican nominee who survives their Hobbesian nomination fight this cycle will do little to improve perceptions of Republican leadership. Similarly, a Republican deemed acceptable to their base will likely be unable to moderate the cultural disconnect between the party and American voters.

For Democrats, their problem is less about the controversy surrounding their likely nominee—though the damage done to Clinton's profile is well reflected in this survey—than giving their voters a reason to turn out in 2016. Their strategy reflects the changing demography of the country, but that strategy depends on sufficient turnout. If the disparity in enthusiasm is not addressed, that strategy is at risk.

An agenda that promises much needed economic change as well as a more responsive and equitable government produces a spark in enthusiasm among Democratic base voters.